

A Novel Life for Local Author

By KEITH L. MARTIN

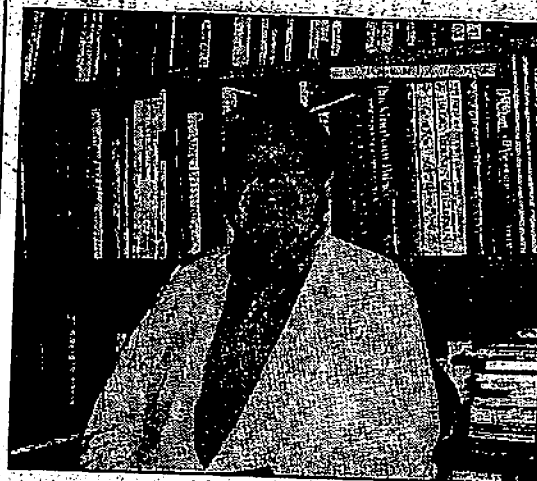
Whether you are reading his novels or sitting and talking with him, one thing about Robert Hale becomes immediately clear. He is a master storyteller.

"I love Bob's stories," says Cissy Greenbaum, owner of Westwinds Bookshop, who has known Hale for 11 years. "He always has good stories which translate well into his writing career."

In both his first novel *Elm at the Edge of the Earth* and in his upcoming release, *The Cloud Dweller*, Hale uses stories from his own life to tell the tales of wonderful characters in spectacular settings and situations.

It is no wonder then that Hale's own life seems like one fantastic journey itself.

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Local author Robert Hale has closed the book on his latest work, *The Cloud Dweller*, which will be available in Duxbury later this month.

For Hale, it's a Novel Life

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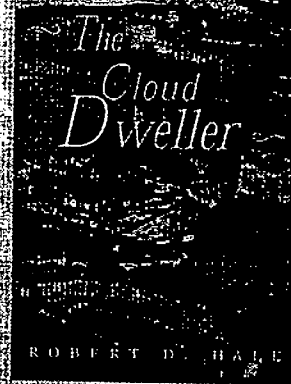
Both novels are set in western New York where Hale was born in 1928 and raised. *Elm* captures a childhood raised by his aunt, a cook in a county home, while his mother battled polio. It was at the part-poorhouse/part-institution where the people who befriended Hale became the inspiration for the characters in the book.

"These people were my friends, and also misfits of society – but I didn't know that," said Hale. "I loved those people and I was always amazed when people would find them strange."

After attending Hamilton College in New York, ambitions of being an actor led him to two job offers: one at a theater in Pennsylvania and one at the Duxbury Playhouse.

"They said you could see the ocean [in Duxbury] and I was turned on by that," said Hale.

So in 1950, Hale came to town and performed at the theater until it closed a year later.



Westwinds Bookshop and the Duxbury Historical Society are co-sponsoring a wine and cheese reception celebrating the release of *The Cloud Dweller* Sunday, September 21, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Winsor House. Tickets are free and may be picked up at Westwinds.

Also, on Thursday, September 25, Westwinds and the Duxbury Senior Center will co-sponsor a luncheon reception where Hale will read from and speak about his new book. This event will begin at 11:30 a.m. Advance reservations are required and can be made by calling the Senior Center at 934-5774 at least 24 hours in advance.

For additional information on either event, call Westwinds Bookshop at 934-2128.

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For his next project, Hale says he may look locally for inspiration.

Working odd jobs to make ends meet, Margaret Metcalf of Westwinds Bookshop asked Hale to watch over the store while she went in the hospital, a task she estimated would take about 10 days.

Hale stayed at the store until she died in 1957.

In 1958, Hale married Lydia Lund of Duxbury and the two moved to New York for a while and then to Connecticut where he took a job as a newspaper reporter and then managing editor for a string of weeklies.

The next chapter of Hale's life brought him to Connecticut College to run their bookstore, then to Wellesley College to do the same. While at Wellesley, Hale became involved in the American Booksellers Association and later become its president.

His knack for speaking not only about books, but the people behind them, led to the creation of the successful Robert Hale Lecture Series at the New England Life Hall in Boston in 1965. The series ran until the 1990s.

In the mid-1980s, as the

new owner of Westwinds, Hale set up a writer's workshop. It was at the workshop where the characters from the county home in his youth became characters for *Elm*. While sharing these character sketches at a lecture, Hale was approached about a book.

He completed the novel for W. W. Norton and Company in six months and sent it to an editor, who immediately called Hale and provided what he calls a great experience in his life.

"He knew Mrs. Fleming [who ran the county home] from the words I put down," said Hale. "This convinced me I could [write a book]."

Published in 1990, the book has produced the same effects for numerous readers, some of whom still write to Hale and share their thanks and identification with the authors "friends" portrayed on *Elm's* pages.

In fact, it is Hale's ability to describe a character, a setting or even a moment, in such a precise, well-crafted way that it comes off the page and into the reader's imagination.

"With *Elm*, I could picture the compound, where his aunt and uncle took care of him, and see that building," said Greenbaum. "[Hale] gives enough description to let the mind create what's on the page."

The same can be said for Hale's latest novel, *The Cloud Dweller*, which will be released in advance later this week at Westwinds, and nationwide on November 15.

The novel tells the story of Philip Farnsworth, the eccentric last descendant of a wealthy family who lives in Oshatakea, a massive estate comprised of various rooms from castles and other manor houses worldwide.

From the unique details of each of the estate's rooms to the intricate characters within Philip's life, Hale sets them all on the page for the reader

to envision.

The book is also a 10-year effort, developed following the death of Hale's father and the author's own recovery from a heart attack and eye surgery.

With the book's pending release, Hale is looking forward to the reaction of readers and hopes that they enjoy his treatment of these new characters who, like those in *Elm*, are "different," he said.

For Greenbaum, Hale's writing is also about something different than the work of many books currently making their way to stores.

"Today, a lot of publishing is a faster, 'grab' type of book. It's hard to get a well-written story versus the fast-paced page-turner," she said. "It's literature versus 'books,' and Bob is a literary writer."

From his book-filled office at his home in Pembroke, Hale is also busy putting the final touches on a book of short stories, while continuing to pen his popular, long-running "Books and Bob Hale" column for the *Clipper*.

For his next project, Hale says he may delve back into his personal life and experiences and write about a place he has always loved and been close to, also filled with wonderful characters - Duxbury.

True to Hale form, the book will likely revolve around a young man working in a bookstore, the people he interacts with and the wonderful stories that result, he said.

"Everyone [in Duxbury] took me in as if I were a long lost child when I came here," said Hale. "I'd like to do something to preserve that feeling of Duxbury at that time because it's gone now and people don't live that way anymore."

With Hale as the author and *Elm* and the *Cloud Dweller* as models, readers will all have the opportunity to revisit those days thanks to the author's work of a wonderful storyteller.